

FOR BETTER ROADS AND BETTER SCHOOLS.

A Cleveland County Teacher "Talks Out in Meeting."

Editor of The Progressive Farmer:

With an apology for neglecting my correspondence by reason of my being very busy on the farm, I shall contribute an article of a rather miscellaneous character.

In the first place, attention will be called to that unflinching topic—for young and old—the weather. May was marked by unusual lack of moisture, which was broken by a freshet of disastrous effects early in June. Since that time this immediate locality has been very dry until quite recently. At Shelby a fine rain fell on last Friday, and this extended over a radius of some six miles. We people eight miles from Shelby have had two reviving showers, but the ground is not wet exceeding a depth of two inches.

Early corn is cut off, gardens have suffered, wheat was not a half crop, fruit is generally a short crop, and cotton small, but very well fruited, considering size and weather conditions.

THE TEACHERS' INSTITUTE

Last week I attended the Teachers' Institute at Shelby, which can be styled a success as institutes go. It was under the charge of home talent, and the work and enthusiasm were of a very creditable order. The attendance of teachers was excellent, 166 being enrolled, and the promptness and punctuality were a manifest improvement on heretofore. Let it be here stated that the work of Prof. C. L. Coon in the last institute was largely responsible for this state of affairs. Heretofore, about one-third attended promptly and continually, and the rest did pretty much as they pleased.

As is known to all who know me, I favor institutes, normals, and all other agencies to inspire and equip the teaching profession, for in this State, God knows the best rural teachers in zeal and equipment are bad enough. But a meagre four months, at starvation salaries, does not appeal to teachers as an inducement, and it requires a spirit of self-sacrifice just a little lower than the angels to meet the conditions.

A four months' term, at the meagre salaries paid in this county, does not leave much after board is paid to even buy decent clothes; not to consider the attendance on teachers' assemblies, normals, institutes, the purchase of educational journals, stand-

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ard works, of libraries, etc., and without something more than mere textbook knowledge, no teacher is thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Unfortunately, however, if a teacher can "cipher" he is called a marvel of erudition. Anybody, or nearly anybody at least, can master arithmetic so that he can "work" the examples. Some of the most plodding mediocres I ever saw could work problems, and many of them did not have sufficient command of language to explain the solution in an intelligent style.

Don't understand me as inveighing against this very important study, but it certainly has, in this section, been "run into the ground" at the expense of language, history, and, in fact, everything else. Arithmetic was taught in the institute work to which I have just referred, but language and history had a singularly gifted and enthusiastic defender.

CONSOLIDATION OF DISTRICTS NEEDED.

One thing that retards our onward march on educational lines in Cleveland County, is too many districts. Our officials are clever men, all right at heart, but have not learned to say "no" often enough and plain enough.

We have 420 square miles, with 84 white and 23 colored districts, making 107 in all. Two public school-houses are within less than a mile of each other, and both for the white race. Numbers of school-houses are in one and one-half miles of each other, and many of them very dilapidated structures. For this, the Board of Education is partly responsible, but not altogether. Patrons and committeemen often misrepresent facts to the Board, and fail to co-operate. Teachers could do much on this line, but generally are more interested in getting schools than in improving conditions. A mistaken idea prevails, that "we get four months school anyway," and we'll have it to read "every man his own school-house."

I have heard unblushing misrepresentations within the last two years to get new districts; where the new site was to be in one and a half miles of two established districts, and in less than two of as many more. A ditch that a ten year old boy could jump was described as a raging torrent, and other just as extravagant statements were made by men who posed as deacons and stewards.

One township, No. 11, has voted a tax. Before we have good schools we must all do that. More money, better houses, fewer schools and better teachers are what must solve the problem.

GETTING BETTER ROADS

I can't leave this article till I shy a few stones at our execrable highways. Township No. 2, of this county, voted the tax, employs convicts and will have good roads. No. 7, No. 8, No. 5, No. 10 and No. 11, gave the beneficent enterprise a black eye to the tune of at least three to one. No. 6, containing, Shelby, failed to vote it, but it lost by a scratch. Good

roads mean one horse and one wagon moving over a good road what it requires of from one to three horses and a wagon over a bad road. Good roads bring about a better school and church interest, better mail facilities and a more general diffusion of knowledge.

The main objection to good roads is the principle of taxation. Some people are like the country jay who killed the showman's snake. The showman remonstrated that the snake cost him \$1,000. "Don't keer if he cost \$10,000," said the rural rooster, "I kills 'em wharever I finds 'em." Some people just know they are "agin" taxation; no matter how beneficent in its provisions.

They had rather keep and feed three horses to draw a cord of wood or a ton of guano over a bad road than draw the same load over a good road with one horse.

They had rather travel three miles an hour over a bad road than eight miles in the same time over a good road.

They had rather either keep their "chaps" at home "becaze the roads is too durned muddy," or else create a new "deestriect" and shorten the school term.

KEEP UP THE AGITATION.

The people of Cleveland County are as good meaning as anybody, but don't know enough. Under present conditions they never will know enough. This is not meant for all of them, for some are very public-spirited. Others would change their views if they understood conditions. These things will get right, but not till subjects are agitated and explained. While nothing but a school teacher, I speak for one who means to keep yelling till something happens. I am a Democrat and a Methodist, but if the local talent of my church or party are in the wrong, I'll kick over the dash-board till things get better.

Every time I am heard from it will be the voice of one crying in the wilderness for better schools, longer terms, better school-houses and for better roads to be built and worked by taxation and convict labor.

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